

# U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Fellow Marylanders:

For many of us, life seems to be returning to a sense of normalcy. Many are back to work, and more can see friends and family members in-person who we could only safely see virtually last year. I am eager like so many of you to resume a more normal pre-pandemic life, but there are still precautions we must take and considerations to keep in mind.

*Are we done with all of this yet?* No. There is still a pandemic, which is affecting all corners of the world. People are still getting sick. More than [4 million people](#) around the world have died from COVID-19 and the numbers are still going up. The U.S. has over [33.79 million confirmed cases](#) with over 606,616 deaths. Infectious diseases like COVID-19 do not respect borders, and we are only truly safe from it when this virus is no longer active globally.

*But is it over in Maryland yet?* Well, yes and no. Governor Hogan lifted the state of emergency on [July 1](#) and more than [75 percent of Maryland adults](#) (18 and older) have had at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccination. Overall, it's good news, but some counties like Garrett and Washington, Somerset and Caroline, have just over [one-third of their adults vaccinated](#), which can leave huge portions of the population vulnerable to new infections. If you travel to parts of Maryland with lower vaccination rates, or travel to states with lower vaccinations rates, [you should continue to take precautions](#) like wearing face masks and observing social-distancing guidelines.

COVID-19 cases have dropped considerably over the last few weeks in our state, but the new [Delta variant](#), which spreads faster and can be more serious, is still getting people sick. Last month, 130 people died from complications of COVID-19 in Maryland. [None of them were vaccinated](#), according to state officials. In addition, unvaccinated people made up 95% of new COVID-19 cases in the state and 93% of new COVID-19 hospitalizations.

The direct link between vaccination status and COVID-19 is not unique to Maryland and is not limited to last month, according to medical experts. This is a trend [replicated across the country](#).

The good news is that in Maryland and other states, [small businesses](#) and restaurants are starting to get back to more “regular” operations. Individuals and families are starting to travel and venture out. Summer camps and youth sports are resuming. If the fans are willing, the Nationals and Orioles have clearance to fill all the seats in their stadiums. This is a new kind of normal though, as all of the above are happening with an eye towards increased cleaning and safety, which is good practice even when not mandated.

*I’ve been vaccinated, so I’m fine, right?* Probably, but even vaccinated people should take precautions. The vaccine is designed to lessen the impacts of the COVID-19 virus, not eliminate them altogether. You can still get sick, but it may not be as serious. According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), if you are vaccinated, you most often do not need to wear a face mask – indoors or outdoors – especially if you are with other people you know are vaccinated.

[Keep one in your pocket or purse though](#). If you go to a doctor’s office or take public transportation, fly on an airplane or go to a business with posted signs requiring a mask, you still need to wear a mask even if you are vaccinated. If you are in a crowded space with people you don’t know and have no idea of their vaccine status, you probably want to be safe and wear a face mask. I certainly would. For kids who are [too young to be vaccinated](#), they probably will be wearing a mask more often than their vaccinated parents.

It also bears mentioning, but the long-term protections afforded by the vaccines are not yet known. Public health officials have been debating about the need for a “booster,” or additional vaccine shot to boost immunity, if the effectiveness of current vaccines wear off over time. The [FDA and CDC](#) continue to advise that a booster shot is not yet necessary. The vaccines continue to prove effective against COVID-19, but we must wait and see before concluding one way or another. This is yet another reason experts recommend that we all wear masks when in questionable environments.

If you are not vaccinated, you will need to [wear a mask more frequently](#), for your safety and the safety of those around you. If you have an underlying medical condition that prevents you from getting the current vaccines, you could be more vulnerable to infection and more severe illness from COVID-19 and other viruses. If you do not have a medical reason that prevents you from getting a shot, you also are still more vulnerable if exposed to the virus.

It bears repeating that ALL of the recent deaths connected to COVID-19 were among people who were unvaccinated. Why put yourself at unnecessary risk?

Thanks to the Biden-Harris administration, vaccine supplies are plentiful. More doctors, pharmacies and local health offices have doses to offer. While many of the larger vaccination locations are closing, mobile vaccination sites are popping up around the state, too. Your local church or community center may be participating, so ask around. Also check out <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/vaccine> to find a health provider anywhere in the state.

This last year and a half has been tough. For many, it has been devastating. We've had so much heartbreak, but we've also seen the very best in our communities as we came together virtually and through the safety of protective gear to help our families and neighbors.

Let's keep it up and continue to protect our communities. If you know someone who has not been vaccinated, help them [find a clinic](#) or schedule an appointment; encourage them to ask their doctor for information to help them decide to get protected. Get your shot and share your experience with others who may be hesitant. We will never fully go back to the way things were prior to the pandemic. But that's okay, as long as the community that emerges is a better, safer and more open and healthy place for all to live and thrive.

Thank you. Stay safe. Get your shot.



Ben Cardin